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AUTHOR Morrison, James L.
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ABSTRACT

An environmental scanning system is structured to identify and evaluate trends, events, and emerging issues. QUEST represents the quick environmental scanning technique, and an ED QUEST process enables an educational organization to clarify its future and define its options. This paper describes how an educational organization can establish an ongoing environmental scanning program to inform an established ED QUEST team. The system requires that a variety of information sources be regularly scanned, abstracted, and evaluated in order to identify emerging issues, trends, and events. Developmental steps include: (1) devising a program structure and a comprehensive taxonomy; (2) identifying and assigning information sources; and (3) finding and training scanners and abstractors. Once established, this technique becomes a systematic, intensive, and relatively inexpensive method of focusing on strategic areas for which more detailed planning and analysis might be beneficial. (JHP)

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INSTITUTIONALIZING ENVIRONMENTAL SCANNING IN THE ED QUEST PROCESS

James L. Morrison

School of Education

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Paper presented at the meeting of the American Educational Research Association, April 20-24, 1987, in Washington, D.C. Note: This paper is modified from James L. Morrison and Thomas V. Mecca, ED QUEST--Linking Environmental Scanning to Strategic Management, a manuscript submitted to the publication committees of the Society for College and University Planning and the Association for Institutional Research for joint publication consideration.

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Running head: Environmental Scanning

INSTITUTIONALIZING ENVIRONMENTAL SCANNING

IN THE ED QUEST PROCESS

Brown and Weiner (1985) define environmental scanning as "a kind of radar to scan the world systematically and signal the new, the unexpected, the major and the minor (p. ix)." Aguilar (1967) has defined scanning as the systematic collection of external information in order to (1) lessen the randomness of information flowing into the organization and (2) provide early warnings for managers of changing external conditions. More specifically, Coates (1985) has identified the objectives of an environmental scanning system as including the following:

- detecting scientific, technical, economic, social, and political interactions and other elements important to the organization
- defining the potential threats, opportunities, or potential changes for the organization implied by those events
- promoting a future orientation in management and staff
- alerting management and staff to trends which are converging, diverging, speeding up, slowing down, or interacting (pp. 2-13, 14)

An environmental scanning system, therefore, is structured to identify and evaluate trends, events, and emerging issues of import to the institution. These terms are defined as follows:

A **trend** is a series of social, technological, economic, or political characteristics, which can usually be estimated and/or measured over time. It is a statement of the general direction of change, usually gradual long-term change, reflecting the forces shaping the region, nation, or society in general.

Trend information may be used to describe the future, identify emerging issues, or project future events. For example, at most institutions, student profiles are changing. Indicators of this trend are the number of minority students or the number of full-time adult students enrolling.

An **event** is a discrete, confirmable occurrence that makes the future different from the past. An event would be, "Federal funding for student financial aid is reduced by 50 percent."

An **emerging issue** is a potential controversy that arises out of a trend or event that may require some form of response. For example, "Litigation as measured by the number of law suits per year in American society is increasing." An immediate consequence of this trend is substantially higher liability insurance for colleges and universities. An emerging consequence arises from a tendency of state legislatures to protect the public by requiring licensure of an increasing number of occupations, including periodic updating of credentials. This consequence implies an enhanced opportunity for the expansion of continuing adult and professional/occupational education programs.

QUEST stands for quick environmental scanning technique. It is designed to facilitate a relatively quick analysis of the external environment and the use of this information in developing alternative futures so that decision makers can plan and manage strategically. An ED QUEST process enables the organization to clarify its future, define its options and "get out in front" of anticipated changes in the environment. However, for the organization to develop the capacity to stay out in front, it must institutionalize the process. That is, it must develop an on-going environmental scanning system to supplement and continuously update the set of critical trends and events developed in the ED

QUEST process described above.

This paper describes how an educational organization can establish an on-going environmental scanning program to inform the ED QUEST team. Such a system requires that a variety of information sources be regularly and systematically scanned and abstracted, and that these abstracts be evaluated periodically in order to identify emerging issues, trends and events that should be considered in the ED QUEST process. Morrison (1987) has described how to develop an on-going environmental scanning program and the initial steps an organization may take in developing such a program. These steps include developing a program structure and a comprehensive taxonomy with an electronic filing system, identifying and assigning information resources, securing scanners, and training scanners and abstractors.

GETTING STARTED

The ED QUEST team facilitator is responsible for producing the Future Prospects Notebook in order to get the ED QUEST process underway. In essence, this notebook consists of a literature review of existing information resources readily available. The review is limited by the amount of time the facilitator has available for this endeavor. One of the advantages of an on-going environmental scanning program is that information resources are regularly reviewed by a number of people. The more individuals who serve as scanners, the greater the number of information resources which can be used. Therefore, one of the first steps in institutionalizing the environmental scanning system is obtaining volunteers to do scanning.

One approach to expand the number of individuals beyond the ED QUEST team

itself would be to offer a half-day planning workshop focusing on strategic planning models. This would include the ED QUEST model and would focus on the use of environmental scanning information in planning activities for the institution as a whole and for its constituent parts, including program planning within individual departments or functional areas. A major part of the workshop would be an exercise to identify and evaluate critical trends and emerging issues. This exercise would enable participants to bring their individual knowledge of the external environment to a discussion, which could result in expanding the event and trend set developed during the first ED QUEST activity. Moreover, this workshop should generate enthusiasm for establishing a system for systematically seeking indications of change in the external environment. The information could then be used to plan for the future of academic programs and administrative units, as well as for the future of the organization itself. This enthusiasm should encourage volunteers to participate as scanners in the environmental scanning program.

DEVELOPING PROGRAM STRUCTURE

The structure of the program could be quite simple. The ED QUEST team facilitator would chair the scanning committee, consisting of the ED QUEST team members. In addition, the facilitator would assign information sources to each scanner and would be responsible for collecting and filing scanning abstracts. Periodically, perhaps bimonthly or quarterly, the ED QUEST team would meet as a scanning evaluation committee to sort, sift and evaluate the significance of the abstracts. Each meeting would conclude with additions to the trend or event set and perhaps with updated information on trends and events already in the set.

DEVELOPING THE SCANNING TAXONOMY

The trends and events identified in the initial ED QUEST activity and in the workshop for volunteer scanners may be used to develop the rough draft of a scanning taxonomy. The objective is to develop a taxonomy so that every possible item resulting from scanning has a logical place to be classified. It is recommended, therefore, that the initial draft be supplemented by adopting or modifying taxonomies used by other organizations (e.g., modifying the taxonomy used by United Way of America; see Figure 1). The latter taxonomy is

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Insert Figure 1 About Here

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particularly useful because it is now possible for educational organizations to have access to the environmental scanning data base developed by United Way. This data base, accessed through United Way's Human Care Network, a nationwide telecommunications network for not-for-profit organizations, includes abstracts from scanners throughout the country. Some of these scanners are in colleges and universities on a subnetwork maintained by United Way for higher education. (A similar network could be established for public schools.) By using the same taxonomy, it is possible to access the United Way data base as well as contribute to it. Using this data base, however, requires telecommunications capability as well as access to an electronic filing system.

ORGANIZING THE FILES ELECTRONICALLY

Electronic files facilitate review, referral and updating. Moreover, through using an electronic filing system, it is easier to develop consortium

relationships with similar institutions or with institutions in the same geographic area. One electronic system that should be investigated is the one used by United Way, Prudential, and United Airlines (Mist Plus, a software program produced and marketed by Micro-Computer Information Support Tools, New Era Technologies Incorporated, Washington, D.C.). The scanning program at the University of Minnesota uses dBase II. Given the computer support system available in many educational organizations, it is recommended that the specific filing system be developed from existing commercial software (dBase II, Lotus 1-2-3, etc.).

IDENTIFYING LITERATURE SOURCES AND DATA BASES

Information sources include newspapers, magazines, journals, TV and radio programs, conferences, and so forth. The important criterion is diversity. For example, it would be important to include major newspapers representing different parts of the country (e.g., The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, The Miami Herald, The Chicago Tribune, The Los Angeles Times, The Christian Science Monitor, and USA Today). The Chronicle of Higher Education and Education Week focus on education. There are a number of magazines/journals which provide good scanning information in a variety of areas. For example, in the social/demographic area, there are American Demographics and Public Opinion. In the technological sector, there are High Technology, Datamation, BYTE, Computer World, Discover, and Information World. In the economic sector, there are Business Week, The Economist, Fortune, Forbes, Money, Inc., and The Monthly Labor Review. In the political sector, there are New Republic, The National Review, The National Journal, and Mother Jones.

Magazines and journals that spread across these sectors include Vital Speeches of the Day, Across the Board, Naisbit Trend Letter, Kiplinger Washington Letter, Time, Newsweek, U.S. News and World Report. and The Futurist. Morrison, Renfro, and Boucher (1984) identify a number of other information resources, including those used by the ACLI Trend Analysis Program and the ERIC Clearinghouse on Higher Education.

In addition to those resources commercially available, a number of government agencies publish trend data, many times at little or no cost. For example, GAO Reports may be obtained from the U.S. General Accounting Office, Document Handling and Information Services Facility, P. O. Box 6015, Gaithersburg, MD 20877, phone 202 275-6241. NCES reports are available from NCES, Washington, D.C. Periodic Rand reports may be obtained from The Rand Corporation, Publications Department, 1700 Main Street, P.O. Box 2138, Santa Monica, CA 90406-2138.

ASSIGNING SCANNERS INFORMATION RESOURCES

Assigning scanners specific materials for regular review and analysis provides a measure of confidence that most "blips" on the radar screen will be spotted. A suggested procedure of assigning information resources is first to ascertain what materials, conferences, and so forth, are regularly read or attended by scanners. The list of materials regularly read by scanners should be compared to the list of important information resources identified in the above activity. If at all possible, scanners should be assigned material which they already regularly review. It is likely that there will be material which is not regularly read; in such cases, it is recommended that scanners be asked

to volunteer to read those resources. Moreover, the scanning committee chair should institute a procedure to "spot check" how well the information resources are being reviewed. If there are many scanners, it is advisable to build in redundancy (i.e., have two scanners for the same information resource).

TRAINING SCANNERS

Scanners need orientation and training in scanning and reporting information from these materials via abstracts. That is, scanners should keep in mind that they are scanning to anticipate social, economic, technological and legislative/regulatory changes in order to facilitate planning and policy formulation. Therefore, they should seek signals that indicate departures from expected futures. Specifically, when scanning their assigned materials, they should ask themselves if the items:

1. represent events, trends, developments, or ideas never before encountered
2. contradict previous assumptions or beliefs about what seems to be happening
3. represent new twists to old arguments
4. can be linked to other abstracts previously written or seen
5. discuss new patents, inventions, and/or research results
6. have implications for the long-range program or management of the institution
7. contain polls or forecasts

TRAINING ABSTRACTORS

It would be ideal if scanners would also serve as abstractors. However, as noted above, it may be that one or two student assistants would have to be employed for this task. Irrespective of who does the abstracting, however, it is recommended that all scanners and IR staff personnel be trained to write abstracts.

The lead sentence of an abstract should be a response to this question: "If I had only a few minutes to describe this article to a friend, what would I say?" What is the most important idea or event that indicates change? The response to this question should be followed by a one paragraph explanation. Whenever possible, statistical data should be included. The summary should be limited to no more than one-half page of single-spaced, typewritten copy.

Each abstract should have an implications section responding to the question, "How will the information in this article affect this institution's programs or management?" The author should include a list of those emerging issues suggested by the article, a description of future events occurring as a result of the trend identified by the article, and/or an identification of issue stakeholders if they are not listed in the article.

Speculation about implications is a part of the scanning and abstracting process. Here the abstractor tries to determine an item's potential for affecting other facets of the social environment and/or the institution. There are no "right" answers. Note, however, that some articles may offer no implications that are immediately apparent. The scanning committee, with the benefit of related abstracts from other scanners, may be able to detect implications that a single monitor cannot.

CONDUCTING SCANNING COMMITTEE MEETING

A scanning committee meeting should be held every two to three months to handle the approximately 70-100 abstracts that would probably come in during that period. There are several approaches that could be used to prepare for a scanning committee meeting. For example, at the Georgia Center for Continuing Education, the chair segregates abstracts according to subject area (i.e., all those concerning office automation go into one pile, employee compensation go into another, and those difficult to assign into a miscellaneous pile). Each member of the committee is assigned a particular packet of abstracts to review in detail. All members read the entire selection of abstracts received, but are requested to come to the meeting with a list of trends and potential issues derived from those abstracts in their packet that are new. They are expected to examine how these trends and issues relate to or conflict with other trend areas identified previously (Morrison, Simpson and McGinty, 1987).

An alternative approach is for each member to review all scanning abstracts and come to the meeting prepared to sort them into three categories: "winners," "losers," and "middle-of-the-roaders." Irrespective of which approach is used, the meeting itself may last from two to three hours: a round robin, with each person reporting his/her subject area, followed by a free-for-all discussion. The end result of this meeting should be a list and brief description of 15 or so trends, possible events, and emerging issues that appear important to consider in the annual ED QUEST exercise.

SCANNING NEWSLETTER

A scanning newsletter can serve to bring important new trends and events to

the attention of all members of the institution and, at the same time, provide recognition for the efforts of volunteer scanners. Certainly the trends and events identified between ED QUEST sessions in scanning committee meetings should be included in the newsletter. This newsletter could be a "stand alone" or could be included as an insert in one of the regularly published institutional newsletters. The newsletter, whether stand alone or insert, should have a logo, be "jazzy," printed on colored paper, and have special boxes labeled, "Wild Speculations." The important point is to avoid anointing speculations, but to recognize that the purpose of the newsletter is to print items that have implications for the institution.

WRITING ISSUE BRIEFS

After reviewing abstracts at the scanning committee meeting, the committee should be able to identify those 15-25 or so trends, events, and emerging issues that are most important to monitor. It may be that greater in-depth analysis of a particular item is needed. The CEO may wish to commission an issue brief on the item, to be written by a member of the ED QUEST team, an administrative staffer, a staff member in the research and evaluation office, or a faculty member. A recommended format for an issue brief is:

- What is the issue?
- What do we know about it?
- What are the implications?
- What should the organization do?

CONCLUSION

ED QUEST is a process designed to permit decision makers to share their estimates of trends and events in future environmental contexts, that have critical implications for the organization's policies and strategies. It is a systematic, intensive, and relatively inexpensive way to focus quickly on strategic areas for which more detailed planning and analysis would be beneficial. Through participating in the process, senior leaders develop a shared understanding of high priority issues and a view of the dynamics of the changing environment of the institution. Participating in the ED QUEST process facilitates team building, focuses attention of decision makers upon the longer-term future, and assures that the strategic options developed from the process have the authority from top management.

In order to provide a continuous, objective, complete, and detailed analysis of the external environment, the institution should develop a systematic environmental scanning and forecasting system. If important information about the external environment does not exist in the ED QUEST team, or is not given an opportunity to be articulated, it will not be included in ED QUEST deliberations. Consequently, the results of the ED QUEST process will suffer. However, with an ongoing environmental scanning system, the quality of the information that goes into the ED QUEST Futures Prospects Notebook will be greatly improved, thereby enhancing the quality of the analysis of the ED QUEST team. As importantly, since members of the ED QUEST team should be involved as scanners and as members of the scanning committee on a continuous basis, they will increase their orientation to the future and will become more proficient participants in the yearly ED QUEST planning exercise. Incorporating ED QUEST

and a systematic environmental scanning system in the long-range planning activities of the institution should enable decision makers to anticipate what is happening in the state, region, nation, and world, and, correspondingly, to plan more effectively.

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Figure 1. United Way environmental scanning taxonomy.

File	File Name	Related Subjects	File	File Name	Related Subjects
S—Social					
S-1	Population Size/ Composition	U.S. Population Growth/Size (includes projections, baby boom, baby boomlet)	S-9	Education	School Enrollment (includes projections)
		Aging Population			Preschool Education
		Population Age Distribution			Elementary Schools
		Birth Rate/Longevity			High Schools
		Death Rate/Longevity			Higher Education
		Elderly			Support for Public Education
		Children			Teaching/Teachers
		Veterans			School Problems (includes dropout, discipline, truancy)
		Baby Boomers			Educational Quality
		Teenagers			Literacy/Illiteracy
S-2	Population Migration/ Mobility	Regional Migration			Computers in Education
		Rural/Urban Movement			Educational Policy
		Immigration to U.S.			Alternative/Continuing Education
		Immigrants	S-10	Crime	Violent Crime (includes family abuse, terrorism)
S-3	Families/ Households	Household Formation			Nonviolent Crime
		Household/Family Size			Crime Rates
		Marriage			Prisons
		Divorce			Youth Gangs
		Single-Parent Families			Crime Deterrence/Prevention
		Teen Pregnancy	S-11	Values/Attitudes	National Public Concerns (includes public mood, satisfaction, attitudes on major issues, confidence in institutions)
		Child Welfare (includes relative well-being of children; missing children)			American Value Systems (includes liberalism, conservatism)
		Child Day Care			Generational Values
S-4	Demographic Overviews	Demographic Overview			Social Transformation
S-5	Cities	Urban Demography			Social Movements (includes peace, women's, environmental, civil rights)
		Urban Futures			
S-6	Minorities	Minorities	S-12	Life-Styles	Youth/Teenage Life-Styles
		Blacks			Alternative Life-Styles (includes gays, cohabitation)
		Asians			Alternative Family Life-styles (includes working couples)
		American Indians			Young Adult Life-Styles
		Hispanics			Retirement
S-7	Women's Roles	Women's Roles	S-13	Religion	Religious Adherence (includes belief levels, church attendance, spirituality)
S-8	Health	Health Care Delivery Systems (includes self-help, hospitals, alternative sites)			Religious Political Activism
		Health Care Costs			Religious Denominations
		Health Care Personnel			Religious Fundamentalism
		Physical Health/Disease			Alternative Religions
		Mental Health			
		Developmental Disability			
		Alcohol and Drugs			
		Infant Mortality			
		Medical Technology (includes pharmaceuticals)			

File	File Name	Related Subjects	File	File Name	Related Subjects
R—Regions					
R-1	Regional Demographics	Regional Population Size (includes projections, state populations, city populations) Northeast: New England, Middle Atlantic North Central: East North Central, West North Central Midwest South: South Atlantic, East South Central, West South Central	R-2	Regional Economics	West: Pacific Mountain Sunbelt Frostbelt Rustbelt Regional Economics (includes business growth) Regional Employment
FS—Forecast Summaries					
FS-1	1980s Forecast Summaries	1980s Forecast Summaries	FS-2	1980s and Beyond Forecast Summaries	1980s and Beyond Forecast Summaries
P—Political					
P-1	White House	Reagan Policies/Initiatives	P-7	Government Expenditures	Federal Expenditures/Deficit
P-2	Congress	Congressional Initiatives Congressional Representation			State and Local Government Expenditures
P-3	Federal Courts	Supreme Court U.S. District Courts			Social Security Federal Human Service Expenditures
P-4	Electorate	Political Parties Political Participation Political Conservatism/Liberalism Baby Boom: Political Influence	P-8	New Federalism	Federal Block Grants Private-Sector Initiatives Federal Social Policy/New Federalism
P-5	Single-Interest Groups	Single-Interest Groups	P-9	Government Regulation	Government Regulation
P-6	Government Revenues	Federal Taxes State and Local Taxes Federal Tax Reform	P-10	Litigation	Litigation
T—Technological					
T-1	Technological Overviews	Technological Overviews Human Impact of Technology High-Tech Futures	T-5	Automation/ Robotics	Robots Automation
T-2	Computers	Computer Use (includes computer literacy) Electronic Information Distribution (includes videotex, banking and shopping at home, databases, networking, electronic meetings) Artificial Intelligence	T-6	Biotechnology	Biotechnology
			T-7	Advanced Materials	Advanced Materials
			T-8	Research and Development	Research and Development
			T-9	High-Tech Workplace/ Work Force	High-Tech Work-Force Size/Composition High-Tech Jobs (includes types, outlook) High-Tech Workplace Education for High Technology High-Tech Unemployment/Job Loss
T-3	Microelectronics	Microelectronics			
T-4	Telecommunications	TV (includes cable, direct broadcasts satellites) Fiber Optics Telephone (includes mobile phone, videophones)			

File	File Name	Related Subjects
E—Economic		
E-1	U.S. Economic Growth/Decline	Economic Growth/Decline (includes forecasts)
		Economic Cycles
		Gross National Product (GNP)
		Economic/Monetary Policy
		U.S. National Debt
		Capital Investment in U.S.
		Underground Economy
		Economic Development/ Revitalization
E-2	Global Economy	Global Economy
		U.S. Foreign Trade Balance
		Global Population
		Foreign Investment in U.S.
		International Debt
		World Productivity
		Protectionism in U.S.
		Global Regional Conflicts
		International Labor Force
		Global Regions
		Foreign Technology
E-3	Industrial Development/ Business Growth	Industrial Growth and Decline
		Business/Industrial Futures
		Corporate Profits
		New Businesses/Entrepreneurship
		Minority Businesses
		Agricultural Growth/Decline
E-4	Productivity	Productivity
E-5	Economic Structural Change	Economic Structural Change
E-6	Employment/ Labor Force	Labor Force Composition (includes aging labor force, minorities, women)
		Labor Force Size
		Economic Sector Employment
		Affirmative Action/Equal Opportunity Employment
		Foreign Workers in U.S.
		Employment by Firm Size
E-7	Unemployment	Unemployment
		Job Training/Retraining
E-8	Women: Employment/ Income	Women in the Labor Force (includes specific job participation)
		Pay Equity/Pensions for Women
		Working Mothers
		Women's Income/Earnings
		Job Outlook for Women
E-9	Occupations	Occupational Participation
		Occupational Outlook
E-10	Changing Workplace/ Work Force	Changing/Future World of Work (includes changing employee attitudes, baby boom workers, work ethic)
		Alternative Work Schedules (includes flexitime, job sharing, moonlighting, part-time work)
		Worker Participation
		New Management Styles (includes Japanese management, corporate excellence)
		Work at Home
		Alternative Work Arrangements (includes employee leasing, job shopping, temporary employment)
E-11	Organized Labor	Labor Issues/Policies (includes guaranteed employment)
		Union Size/Membership
		Labor Agreements
		Labor Management Relationships
E-12	Personal Income/ Expenditures	U.S. Income Distribution (includes declining middle class)
		U.S. Income Levels (includes per capita, household, and family incomes; dual-income families)
		U.S. Personal Expenditures (includes personal debt)
		Employment Wages
		Employment Benefits
E-13	Inflation/CPI	Inflation/Consumer Price Index
E-14	Poverty	Poverty Rates/Forecasts (includes separate groups living under poverty)
		Public Policy/Response to Poverty
		Hunger
E-15	Public Assistance	Public Assistance
E-16	Housing/Homeless	Home Ownership (includes housing types; mobile homes, single family homes, condominiums)
		Housing Costs/Quality
		Public Housing
		Alternative Housing
		Homelessness
E-17	Transportation	Public Transportation
E-18	Consumerism	Consumerism
E-19	Resources/ Environment	Energy (includes supply, consumption, conservation)
		Water
		U.S. Infrastructure
		Agricultural/Forest Resources
		Environmental Pollution (includes hazardous-waste disposal)
		Work Environment

File	File Name	Related Subjects
PH – Philanthropy		
PH-1	United Way Competitors/Critics	Alternative Federated Funds Court Litigation/Rulings on Charities (includes payroll deduction challenges) Public-Sector Fund Raising (includes government and public schools)
PH-2	United Way-Labor Relationships	UWA Labor Policy
PH-3	Corporate Philanthropy	Corporate Contributions Policy Levels of Corporate Giving Corporate Social Responsibility
PH-4	Donor Choice	Donor Option Plans Donor Decision Making
PH-5	Levels/Patterns of Giving	Levels/Patterns of Giving
PH-6	Nonprofit Supplemental Fund Raising	Nonprofit Profit-Making Businesses Nonprofit Mail Campaigns Conflict: Nonprofit v. For-Profit
PH-7	Voluntarism	Voluntarism
PH-8	Youth and Voluntarism	Youth and Voluntarism
PH-9	Private Foundations	Private Foundations
PH-10	International Philanthropy	International Philanthropy
P-11	Charitable Regulation/ Obstacles	CFC Regulations Tax Policy Affecting Nonprofits Charitable Registration/Reporting Donor Regulation Nonprofit Expense Regulations
PH-12	Overviews on Philanthropy	Overviews on Philanthropy
PH-13	Philanthropic Employment	Philanthropic Employment
PH-14	United Way Issues	United Way Allocations Process United Way Funding Controversies